

IN-CLASS INTERACTION AND STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN INTENSIVE COURSE CLASSES

Maria Josephine Kriesye Sriemulyaningsih⁸

Abstract.

This brief study is to see the relationship of peer interaction within class as well as the lecturer in-class attitude affected the students' motivation and perception in a university education course where English is taught as a foreign language. The lecturers, each functioned as the language class instructor, managed a 100-minute-session in a class consisted of about twenty students ranged from 18 to 21 years old. The setting was the University of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya in which a sort of matriculation program called Intensive Course becomes a compulsory subject for the freshmen.

The hypothesis established confirmed that in-class lecturer's attitude and the peer-interaction affect students' motivation in learning, compared to the material content being exposed. A set of questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection and distributed to the sample of class participants of Intensive Course program. It was hoped that the result would contribute beneficial findings that confirm whether interactions happened fostered the learning motivation of the class participants and how it affected them.

Result showed that the hypothesis was verified to some extent as the students under study stated that the quality of their peer interaction was one of the grounds that contributed security feeling they need to have in order to freely participate in the learning process without having had to fear of making mistakes. The other ground which is also crucial is the trait of the lecturers that motivate them to persistently continue learning English, found to be challenging to most. Such trait is characterized as being understanding and friendly toward students. It is then hoped that the teachers of English as a Foreign language would realize the importance of having necessary teaching personality that accentuate their classes.

Key words: peer interaction, student motivation, Intensive Course program

Introduction

In Indonesia, where English has been widely taught as a foreign language in most schools and educational institutions, its learners face specific circumstances that need to be addressed to. Even though

⁸ Maria Josephine Kriesye Sriemulyaningsih *adalah* Dosen Bahasa Inggris di FKIP Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya.

objectives have been clearly set up to ensure methodical and efficient learning of the target language, little is known about the role of educational psychology that also contributes significantly to the success or failure of the learners. Aside from the language learning methods that focus mainly on the resources to be used, aspects of language to be learned, and the language skills or components expected to be mastered, motivation plays its basic role. Chomsky (1989) states as *"The truth of the matter is that about 99 percent of teaching is making students interested in the material."* It is then why the writer draws her attention on finding out how in-class interaction, both between peers or learners to lecturer attributes to motivation when learning English as a Foreign Language.

Clement, Dornyei, and Noes (1994) mentioned that learners' motivation stands out as an important subject that receives much attention for its resilience in teaching or learning. This recent remark has somehow been demonstrated by previous findings that achievement in language learning is related to measures of attitude and motivation (Clement, Gardner, and Smythe, 1977).

As a start, motivation can be defined as what Franken (1994) stated: *"The arousal, direction, and persistence of behavior"*. In terms of language learning, Ellis (1999:300g) describes *task motivation* as something where the interest is felt by the learner in performing different learning tasks. Moreover, motivation has four major characteristics: what directs our actions, initiation of taking actions, pursuing the actions intently, and persisting longer in those things that causes it (Sternberg, 1995). Clearly seen as a powerful drive, positive motivation is something that should be generated upon a process of learning. Creating motivating learning atmosphere that thus attribute to maximum learning is believed to result on more participation and achievement. The absence of motivation might result on less enjoyment and participation.

Motivation Generated by Interaction or the Vice Versa?

Many studies have identified motivation that functions as an internal drive which pushes learners to accomplish a given task in order to achieve a planned goal or objective. In classrooms where a common goal or objective has to be achieved, motivation is the result of interaction that connects its participants. In the classroom, students interact with both peers and teacher or, in university level, lecturer (Pica, 1992 In Kral, 1999:59). It is then the existing interaction that results in the level of motivation, either low, moderate, or high.

At first, teacher-student interaction is a focal dimension that affects the learners' level of motivation. Chambers (1999) in his longitudinal study of British learners' motivation pointed out that the teacher factor is a lot more important than learning environment, textbook or others. A teacher who is capable of involving his or her caring quality, friendly, and genuine tends to generate positive feelings in learners, which in turn

encourages high motivation. Arnold and Brown (1999), in their definition of motivation, state that interaction and emotions are two knotted dimensions. That is, if the positive feelings and emotions characterize the classroom interaction, a high motivation is likely to emerge. To strengthen such, Thomas (1991) remarks as “Feelings and attitudes can make for smooth interaction and successful learning, or can lead to a conflict and a total breakdown of motivation”. Hence, Thomas clearly pinpoints the idea that negative interaction inhibits students’ motivation. It is then obvious that an emphatic student-teacher interaction positively affects their motivation.

To develop such positive motivation, the teacher should do no less than becoming an active listener who can correct errors positively and is genuine in interacting with the students. The teacher or lecturer is supposed to interact not only asking students to things for the sake of getting the answer, but also to elicit more utterances spoken in the target language. Once the immediate students become more aware of their teacher’s or lecturer’s involvement, they observe that s/he is encouraging them. However, if the teacher, for instance, is very offensive in her/his way of correcting errors while interacting, s/he is more likely to hinder her/his own class participants’ desire for learning.

At second point, peer interaction also plays a crucial role in the process of motivation. A classroom is a living laboratory where each of its members brings his or her diversities that eventually enrich the immediate circumstance. The rich diversities reside in the different personalities, motives, and expectations that exist within the class. Within such complexities, probable interaction that might take place vary from those that are negative to moderate and also to the expected positive ones. It is then later true that such negative interaction, as what Johnson and Johnson (2008) refers to as “rugged individualism” is possible to exist thus obstruct learning motivation. Such negative interaction commonly implies more competitive and negative individualistic effort. This negative type of interaction may also hold some non-humanistic characteristics such as bullying, teasing, scolding, and such like. When these occur, class participants’ motivation automatically lowers down. Rugged individualism take place when learners perceive that they can obtain their goals if and only other individuals with whom they compete lose. Some of the learners who are involved in this interaction will certainly feel the pressure of their peers and, gradually, demotivate themselves.

On the other hand, “social interdependence” phenomenon, as Deutsch (1994) explains, is another circumstance when there is positive relationship among students, greater commitment to the group, feeling of responsibility, and “*motivation and persistence toward the goal achievement*”. In such condition, interaction utilizes in class participants a positive interdependence since they perceive that they can reach their goals if and only other individuals with whom they interactively linked

also reach their goal in common. Therefore, they promote each other motivation.

Interaction and motivation are then interrelated; a positive interaction can increase motivation and the vice versa. In other words, a high motivation is generated from positive interpersonal relationship, feelings, and healthy attitudes. Whereas, an interaction that is attributed with negative emotions and destructive behavior is more likely to lessen learners' motivation to help learning process keep on progressing.

Teacher and Class Motivation

As having been aforementioned that the classroom is a living laboratory that brings out its rich diversities, it carries risks to have not only supportive but also detrimental interaction within its members. Pica (1992) in Kral (1999:59) notes foreign language classrooms as "...complicated social communities. Individual learners come with their own constellation of native languages or dialects and culture, proficiency level, learning style, motivation and attitude toward language learning". In other words, each learner is a unique individual and the class teacher or lecturer is advised to be aware of those individual learners' differences in her or his effort to succeed in teaching.

The expected interaction is likely to be achieved by having the teacher or lecturer's powerful position. Being both the role model and facilitator, the teacher or lecturer possesses the capacity to guide his class participants in such a way, creating collaborative emotion that gather them during learning process. It is the teacher or lecturer's most capacity to help drawing her/his class see their common goal and encourage the class participants to achieve it, as a team.

As the class keeps on going, the students might have undergone processes that somehow change their motivation. This motivation change can be either low or high, depending on the conducted interaction that had taken place or even, more importantly, on the teacher's attitude and conduct in the respective classroom. Accordingly, the students who initially came to his or her language class having low or moderate motivation might experience a rise due to constructive atmosphere s/he observes. On the other hand, a learner who at first was very enthusiastic might degrade his or her motivation after experiencing sort of non-constructive class ambience. In general, the role of the teacher or the lecturer and the learners themselves in enhancing motivation is crucial.

Methodology

This brief study is aimed at displaying points that might explain the reasons of motivation existence in their classroom. The subjects were the second semester students of a private university in Surabaya, having taken a matriculation course named Intensive Course bearing 18 credits on their first semester. Out of 54 students, 19 course participants served

as sample as its 30% of its total population. The participants were randomly selected to represent the existing three groups of A, B, and C taking similar course on their first semester. To inform the readers, each group was taught by a set of teaching team consisted three to four lecturers. The three teaching teams were rotated each month, enabled by its parallel scheduling system, facilitating all three groups obtained fair and similar variation of teaching team. This rotation policy enabled all the course participants obtained experience from all eleven lecturers joining the whole Intensive course teaching team.

The questionnaires as a means of data collection were distributed at the end of the participants' first semester. Its nature of the subject, motivation, leads to use the quantitative and descriptive qualitative. It is challenging to measure, yet the type of data collection was chosen as it was both time and money efficient. Once it was asked to be filled in, the writer explained the questionnaire items and allowed the students to also use their native other than English if they found difficulties in using this target language. The procedure took 30 to 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire sufficiently.

The questionnaire items were divided into three major parts containing 12 questions. The first part was addressed to get information about the students' English as Foreign Language background, the second was to know the Peer-Interaction feel, and the last was to get hints on Student-Lecturer Interaction atmosphere. Concerning the first section, its aim is to get basic information on students' attitudes and motivation towards learning English. The second is to know students' interaction in the classroom, during the respective course, to see whether the existing interaction enhances or lowers the students' motivation. The third is to attempt to understand the role of the student-teacher interaction and its effect on motivation.

The Results and Discussion

As having been explained, the first part of the questionnaire was to know the students' determination in learning English as Foreign Language in tertiary education. It has been understood that the students have had their English background prior to university stage. It was then discovered that the whole sample population of students answered the introductory item, asking whether they like learning EFL or not, with a positive statement. Out of 19 samples, none expressed their displeasure toward English learning. It proves that the students or the subjects have positive attitude toward English and they are motivated to start out their learning process.

However, a minor contradiction (10%) was observed in the following item when they were asked why they chose to study English at university level. The question provided open options which allowed the respondents to opt more than just one. Thus, it was possible for a respondent to double check more than a single option. Two participants

mentioned that they had been forced to study English at university level, while previously no one express their negative attitude toward English learning. The other 12 respondents, consecutively, admitted that English is a good option for their future career (63%), assumed to be a drive of extrinsic motivation. Others, 3 respondents, stated English is interesting (15%) which was categorized as intrinsic motivation. Two participants (10%) stated that they feel the need to be accepted in English-speaking communities.

When later the participants were asked how they perceived English, approximately 2 participants or 10% of the sample expressed that English is somewhat easy for them while the rest said others. The majority or 9 respondents (47%) responded to this open question, answering that level of English learning difficulty depends on their own lack of skill, the topic being focused, their persistence in learning, and, interestingly, on who teaches. The rest, 6 respondents (32%) simply commented that EFL learning was hard for them. The same number, 6 participants (32%) continued answering the fourth items by admitting that the possible failure they might have done in doing a task was correlated to their English mastery as well, while other answers mentioned task difficulty level, lack of interest, and limited time allocation came sequentially as 36%, 21%, and 16%. This first part of the questionnaire was then viewed as a source of information to see how the subjects' initial motivation. Apart from the minority who acknowledged they were forced to take English as their major, the rest 90% laid their motivation both on majorly extrinsic drive and followed by the intrinsic one.

The second section focuses on peer interaction or interaction between the classmates. In five items which vary from close and open questions, some conclusion can be drawn. The section was firstly introduced by an item asking students how they prefer working in the classroom. Again, as the students were allowed to opt for more than a single answer, double check on options happened. Results show that a considerable number of participants, eleven students, liked to work in groups (58%). Following, 8 students (42%) enjoyed working in pairs as well. Working individually did not seem very popular among the respondents as the option was only favorable to 7 students (36%). The first two rates show that the subjects under observations seemed to feel secure when they are situated to work with classmates. The questionnaires being studied confirmed the answers as those first two criteria mentioned the obtained benefits as they could share ideas, ask explanation of unknown or unfamiliar matters to peers, and compare answers to their own. Those who preferred individual working stated their own reasons of being able to concentrate as well as being able to work in silence.

The next two questions of this second sections asked whether peer in-class responses affect their learning process or not. Laughters, when taking place in classroom situation, did not seem to hinder the students under study from participating in the following learning process. Despite

such feedback, none of the respondents opted to stop participating in the class. Instead, three other options of trying to avoid making the same mistakes, not bothering, and being ready to take another risks were chosen of 47%, 31%, and 21% respectively.

So, it might be assumed that the student-student interaction is not a hindrance for learning to take place, and hence, it does not lower motivation because students' self confidence seems to not be negatively affected. Here, interaction is a good motive for students.

The third section was trying to observe how students-lecturer interaction contributed to their classroom motivation. This section was started with a direct item asking what affects the students' motivation providing them with three options ranging from the group work as class setting, the content or the unit of the lesson, and the in-duty lecturer. Providing the fact the students' choice was not limited, more than one tick was allowed. Surprisingly, the majority of the learners that are 12 in number (63%) relate their excitement or motivation to the lecturer who is teaching during the session. Seven students (39%) stated that content was closely related to their motivation. the rest confirmed that group work was their motivation trigger. Concerning the teachers' personality and attitudes in the classroom, the writer had asked the students about the way they liked the lecturers to be. Here, 18 students (95%) boldly opted to express their preference to work with lecturers who are understanding and friendly toward them and the peers. Only one student opted for the ""Others"" choice without providing any reasons. None of the respondents chose the other two options in which preferred lecturers are the ones who either simply guide and explain the content or the unit or are disciplinarians. To conclude this section and the questionnaire in its general term, two items are added asking the subjects to compare the degree of their motivation in its general terms. They were asked whether the degree of their motivation before and after attending university classes remained the same. Out of 19 respondents, all confirmed positive change upon joining the classes. The reasons expressed vary from increased enjoyment in learning English as the foreign language, increased interest in upgrading more knowledge, to increased interest in telling English stories.

Conclusion

Motivation, as an affective factor, plays a central role in the sense that it is a crucial force which determines the learners' or students' initiation for taking learning action and be persistent in doing so. The conducted brief study displayed a factual existence that to some Indonesians, particularly to the students under the study, English is not an easy matter. Confirming the number that 90 % of the respondents possessed majorly extrinsic motivation to learn this challenging English, in tertiary level, the in-duty lecturers need to bear in mind some of the followings.

About 58% of the respondents stated their preference to work in groups as it somehow supported them in the learning process and became a source of security. It is assumed that group work, in the respective case, has provided positive peer interaction. The positive atmosphere is reflected in the respondents' open acceptance to peer feedback that, even, was formed in laughter. Despite the common assumption that laughter might also be associated to jeer, the students under study had a different acceptance toward it. Laughter that might happen did not seem to discourage the students from participating in further learning activities which also mean that they are willing to experience more risks. Without positive interaction among the class members, another circumstance might have taken place.

In such circumstance, the in-duty lecturers need to be a part of class learning support system. Considering the fact that these students, who found English not easy, majorly possessed external motivation, the lecturers need to interfere in generating secure learning atmosphere where the learners are willing to risk mistakes in order to learn. Sixty three percent of the students under study stated their preference of having understanding and friendly lecturers. It outnumbered other two options categorized as a knowledgeable and a disciplinarian one.

Being an outstanding role model in class, lecturers are fortunate enough to authorize the class they are teaching and leading its members toward its successful learning goal. To achieve it, the class members have the necessity to feel secure during the learning process as risks of making mistakes is normal and natural. The security to learn is possible to obtain as the lecturers are willing to understand their students' apprehension and attend to help generating it.

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